

Covid Slows Efforts to Ease California's Historic Port Logjam
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By Robert Tuttle

(Bloomberg) -- Southern California ports are grappling with record ship backlogs because of Covid-19 protocols and sick dockworkers, and the vessels keep coming.

Twenty-nine more ships are scheduled to arrive and anchor at the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach in the next three days, according to data provided by Capt. Kip Louttit, director of the Marine Exchange of Southern California. A total of 48 vessels were anchored on Thursday, down from an all-time high of 60 on Jan. 28.

"Goods movement ashore to terminals is inefficient because of Covid protocols," he said.

California's biggest ports have become the epicenter of pandemic-driven shipping woes in the U.S. as homebound consumers swamp ports with an influx of goods ordered online from Asia. Peloton Interactive Inc. said Thursday it's unable to meet surging demand for its exercise machines because of shipping delays in Los Angeles and Long Beach, warning that profit will be squeezed.

The pandemic has struck hard in California, with intensive care unit beds in Los Angeles hospitals filling up and ambulance crews being told not to bring patients who have virtually no chance of survival to hospitals. The situation has not only slowed the ability of port workers to contend with incoming ships but, as people shelter at home, many have been ordering goods and increasing the flow of cargo, Louttit said.

Ships lined up to unload in the Southern California ports have been waiting since as long as Jan. 17, according to a list provided by Louttit. Eight vessels were scheduled to arrive Thursday, including three container ships, three tankers, a reefer ship and a car carrier.

--With assistance from Joe Carroll.

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